The Real Thing by ballroompink

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“Joyce … Joyce … listen to me. Marissa … she’s not wrong. I didn’t call her back. … I slept with her. And didn’t call her back. She’s not the only one. I was in a bad place back then. I was being a real dick. Nothing mattered to me then. Sara was gone. … But you know something. I called you back. I came back to you the next day and the next. You are the real thing. We are the real thing. I won’t fuck that up. I am going to work hard to not fuck this up.”

The Real Thing

Author's Note:

- For rillrill, harry_hayes.

Hop's Blazer was parked in her driveway.

Shit.

She had kept her emotions in check as Will prattled on about his library books, but she didn't know if she could keep them bottled in any longer.

She took some deep breaths and got out of the car. She let Will lead the way inside the house. Hop and Jonathan were in the kitchen. The former leaning against the counter drinking coffee while her oldest was working on some school project at the table. They were talking about something other than schoolwork Joyce gathered.

"Leave any books at the library?" Jonathan asked his brother.

"A few, I guess." Will joked back.

Joyce smiled weakly at her boys and tried to avoid Hopper's eyes.

"Um, I'll be back in a bit." Joyce awkwardly announced as she left the kitchen. She made her way to the bathroom, discarding her jacket and purse in the bedroom. She locked the door, and turned on the faucet, looking in the mirror and taking deep breaths. She ran the cool water over her wrists and splashed some on her face. She dabbed it away with a washcloth. She hated this feeling. Feeling like a freak in this town. She knew she wasn't the only one in Hawkins with problems, but why was everyone else so good at hiding them. Hers were always laid out in the open. Married to the deadbeat alcoholic. Left by the deadbeat alcoholic. Missing kid who turned up. (That wasn't a problem, she reminded herself.) And now, dating the biggest womanizer Hawkins has ever known. She just wanted to hide away from the world (i.e. Hawkins) with her boys. Hasn't she dealt with enough judgmental stares and gossip for one lifetime?

She takes another moment in the quiet of the bathroom and takes a deep breath. She exits only to find Hopper lingering in the hallway. She attempts to brush past him, but he hooks his burly left arm around her and nuzzles his face in her neck. His beard tickles. She's really in no mood for this. Really no mood. OK, a bit.

"The boys were wondering about a movie tonight. There's this new one called 'Splash,' about a mermaid that Will mentioned. How 'bout it?"

She doesn't want to go out. More looks. Her body tenses up. "Um … not sure."

"Everything OK?" He notices. He doesn't unlock his arm from her. It's not controlling, it's not possessive, it's still tender and comforting. Damn him. He plants a kiss on the back of her head just for good measure.

She doesn't want to start anything, but she wants to be honest with him. She somehow slips out of his firm yet tender hold and goes to her bedroom, specifically her purse with the Camels. He follows her in there and she lights one up.

"Ran into Marissa Kerbaugh at the library today. She had some not-so-great things to say about you … and me." She already hates her tone.

"Shit."

"I know you went out with her, I'm aware of your past with the ladies of Hawkins. Believe me, I'm well aware. She just made me feel really shitty. She implied you'd be back to your old ways soon enough. Just like you were after you two went out. And then after Will walked away, I told her to screw herself."

Hop can't help but laugh at idea of Joyce telling the librarian off, but he stifles his laughter when he looks back up at Joyce.

"Don't laugh at me." She says with that wild look in her eyes.

Hop puts his hands up and says, "Not laughing at you. Just wish I could have been there. I would have brought popcorn."

“Don’t make light of this.”

Hop is silent for a minute. He places his hands on her shoulders and breathes in the smoke.

“Joyce … Joyce … listen to me. Marissa … she’s not wrong. I didn’t call her back. … I slept with her. And didn’t call her back. She’s not the only one. I was in a bad place back then. I was being a real dick. Nothing mattered to me then. Sara was gone. … But you know something. I called you back. I came back to you the next day and the next. You are the real thing. We are the real thing. I won’t fuck that up. I am going to work hard to not fuck this up.”

“OK.”

“And can I add something to this conversation? You’re the catch of the town. You’re strong, you’re an amazing mother. The bravest woman I know. Those others ladies couldn’t hold a candle to you. Also … also … you’re cute as a button. Especially when you’re passionate about something.”

Hop then takes the cigarette out of Joyce’s mouth and takes it for his own. Having hopefully defused the situation, this particular time, he ventures to leave the room and says, “This is where you could say something nice about me.”

Joyce scrunches her face and looks up at him. “You’ve got a nice butt.”

“Yeah, I really do.”